

REVIEWS



General



Karin Guggeis et al., eds. *Football: One Game – Many Worlds*

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THE BUREAU of Culture (Kulturreferat der Landeshauptstadt München) and the City Museum (Münchner Stadtmuseum) of Munich, the city which played host to the 2006 FIFA World Cup, entrusted the cultural anthropologist Karin Guggeis with the editing of the present volume in commemoration of the World Cup. The editor could engage writers from various fields such as science (mostly cultural anthropology), sport, literature and journalism. As a result, the volume offers not only a plethora of possible approaches to soccer (football), it also gives a good idea of this popular sport's many aspects. In addition, the volume includes a great number of fascinating photographs, fascinating because they often show some of the more unusual faces soccer presents all over the world in a much higher degree of immediacy than a text could. The texts are in English as well as in German so that as large a readership as possible will be able to enjoy them and at the same time learn a lot of new things about this sport.

The publication of this volume was guided by two intentions: first, to demonstrate the degree to which soccer has penetrated the world, and second, although this is not explicitly stated, to treat soccer as a cultural phenomenon, or to state it more clearly, to investigate the possibility of analyzing soccer as a subject of cultural anthropology.

Every page vividly demonstrates how deeply and widely soccer has penetrated the world. The degree of penetration is not registered solely in the number of soccer players and fans; the book reflects how thoroughly this sport has permeated all aspects of life, and shows that soccer is a truly cultural phenomenon. In order to demonstrate this, I would like to mention just a few examples it contains.

In Thailand, British soccer star David Beckham is pictured in a Buddhist temple, together with a Buddhist figure. Beckham stands with both hands on his slightly

bent knees preparing to run onto the field before a match begins, while above his head the image of a Buddha figure appears. In Italy, Diego Maradona is treated as a patron saint of Naples, with his own altar and image, which shows him being venerated as he appears out of Mt. Vesuvius holding up a football with both hands towards the sky. When some groups of indigenous people demanded an audience with the President of Argentina in 2005 in order to receive better treatment, they clad themselves in the uniform of the national soccer team in order to demonstrate their patriotism. In Pakistan, a devout Muslim pilgrim in need of money sold soccer balls he had manufactured himself in order to please children and his devotees and to provide himself with necessary funds. He learned this technique in his youth. The Punjab, where he grew up, is an area where soccer balls are produced by family units. In Ghana, West Africa, coffins are made in the shape of something that represents a person's occupation in life; a coconut for farmers, a tuna fish for fishermen, or another item characteristic of a person's trade. The coffin is then customarily carried through the village or town. In recent years, orders for coffins in the shape of a soccer boot have dramatically increased, even if the person for whom it is made was not a soccer player. Japan has experienced a boom in soccer manga; a story serialized in twenty volumes is widely read by boys and girls.

In East Africa highly satirical manga enjoy great popularity. For example, in Tanzania, the manga artist Kipanya has the ruling party's team playing against the opposition party's team. When the teams emerge from the benches each one is depicted with its respective characteristic features. The head of the ruling party is a fat and tall fellow with the ball in his right hand, the umpire's flag in his left, and the umpire's whistle clamped in his mouth. In this pose he looks defiantly at the surroundings. The head of the opposition party, in contrast, is of small stature, looks nervous, and to top it off, is barefooted. The umpire is depicted in the right corner as a mouse who looks rather embarrassed because he has been deprived of the tools of his trade. In this country, where the ruling party has a stranglehold on the management of the country, the outcome of politics as well as of a soccer game is already determined before the game begins. In Ghana, in order to get the message across to the citizens that he will care more for workers and farmers than for soccer, President Rawlings chose to let several large soccer stadiums fall into decay. In Europe and South America there are soccer stadiums provided with a chapel or a church, where members of the club swear lifelong loyalty and love to their club in a special ceremony. Funerals for members are also held there.

Such interesting phenomena in relation to soccer are then analyzed as problems related to the respective cultures. For example, the question is raised as to why the Argentinian-born Maradona, an outsider, could become a patron saint of Naples in Italy. In Italy, there is a pronounced economic gap between north and south. For many years the economically and culturally privileged north disparaged the south as being "Europe's Africa" and "Italy's shame." Southern Italy is very aware of and sensitive to this situation. Therefore, Naples chose the donkey, a symbol of inferiority, in contrast to the team of Rome, the representative of northern Italy, whose team's symbol is the mythical female wolf that nurtured the Roman Empire's founding heroes. The person who made it possible for the south to take

revenge on the rich and privileged north was Maradona, the outsider. In this way, he appeared to truly be Naples' guardian saint defending it against the north.

Stories in which the weak gain a means of self expression and self esteem through soccer are not limited to this book; such successful sports stories are used quite commonly. For example, the national team of Algeria, founded in 1958, contributed a great deal to forging a sense of national identity during the war of independence from France. Similarly, when Catalonia and the Basque region were severely oppressed during the Franco regime, the teams FC Barcelona and Athletic Bilbao helped to recreate their region's own national consciousness by fighting the Franco team Real Madrid.

Soccer has undoubtedly helped the socially weak to have their hopes fulfilled. However, it must also be said that soccer did not always work only in favor of the weak. The game provides equal chances for both teams to have their hopes become reality. In the case of Maradona's deification as mentioned above, victory functions for weak Naples as revenge towards the north, while a victory for Rome over the south, in contrast, reproduces that area's predominance. Soccer is a cultural device which may deliver the fulfillment of hope to either one of the competing teams. However, this is a characteristic of all types of competitive sports, not only soccer.

The relevant question here is, in what cultural context can the victory of a team or a team's position in society be placed? The context determines the specific cultural meaning of soccer. Therefore, the challenge for cultural anthropology is to investigate this relationship. The authors refer to this question when they repeatedly state that "soccer is more than simply a sport." This book amply demonstrates that soccer can become a subject of research in cultural anthropology.

What then is soccer's place in a cultural context? This context is truly variegated because it relates to such areas as religion, politics, economics, race and nationality, identity, education, gender, body, values and worldview, colonialism, and social gaps. However, I agree with the editors of this volume in their assessment that the study of soccer culture has not yet reached an advanced stage. Cultural anthropology has chosen international sports such as soccer as a topic of research only in recent years. Since the nineteenth century, forms of sport characteristic to traditional societies have been discussed under such general labels as traditional sport, indigenous sport, or ethnic sport. While I cannot pursue this topic further in this review, I wish to point out that the theoretical models developed for the study of ethnic sport can also be applied to the study of soccer. In any case, the present volume succeeds in showing how interesting soccer is as a research topic, and it presents us with a number of hints that are of great interest for the study of soccer as a cultural phenomenon.

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